



Doing Business in Liberia: 2010 Country

Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies

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Chapter 1: Doing Business In Liberia

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Market Overview

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- In 2009, Liberia improved 10 places on the International Finance Corporation's (IFC's) "Doing Business" survey, to 149 out of 183 countries; the government is determined to continue to improve the rating.
- During the first half of 2009, Liberia signed 10 investment contracts worth over \$100 million dollars. The government had already achieved its annual target of \$100 million dollars in new investment by July 2009. GDP grew an estimated 4.9% in 2009, down from 7.1% in 2008, due to steady decline in export demand for Liberia's primary products. Growth for 2010 is projected at 7.5%, influenced by increased output of timber and food crops.
- Average annual inflation was an estimated 8% in 2009, down from 17.5% in 2008; largely due to the slump in global prices of food and fuel.
- The March 2008 Census determined Liberia has a population of 3.5 million, with an annual growth rate of 2.1%.
- Rubber continues to dominate the export sector, accounting for nearly 61% of total exports during the period, January-September, 2009. Diamond exports under the Kimberley process, amounted to \$7.4 million through September 2009. Gold exports reached \$3.6 million during the same period. Timber and iron ore exports have not yet resumed.
- Food, including the nation's staple (rice) accounted for about 29% of total imports during the period January-September, 2009; and Machinery/Transport Equipment accounted for over 23% of total imports in the same period.
- Imports (\$551 million) exceeded exports (\$148 million) in 2009, as Liberia's balance of payments continued to deteriorate. Import dependence put some strain on the currency, which depreciated approximately 10% during 2009.
- Liberia is no longer under UN Security Council economic sanctions, but some close associates of former Liberian President Charles Taylor are sanctioned as individuals and an arms embargo remains in effect.

Note: The government of Liberia is revising laws and regulations related to trade and investment. Data collection is improving, but many figures are estimates, as official data are being systematically collected.

Market Challenges

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- Liberia is rebuilding after a prolonged civil war that ended in 2003; about 10,500 United Nations peacekeepers still provide security and stability throughout the country.
- Liberia remains one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated real GDP per capita of \$128.5 in 2009 (According to IMF estimates in December 2009).
- The judicial system is weak and unreliable. Laws applied to businesses and contracts are inconsistent and are routinely breached.
- The labor force is largely unskilled and the literacy rate is 55.5%.
- Infrastructure -- roads, bridges, ports of entry, the electrical grid, and the water system -- are all in need of major rehabilitation. Domestic travel and transport is difficult. At present, only the Freeport of Monrovia is used for international trade; its services are limited and expensive. Security and services at the country's only international airport are gradually improving.
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) monitors prices of a wide range of basic products, and sets ceiling prices for rice, cement and petroleum products.
- Liberian law prohibits ownership of land by non-Liberians and reserves 26 business sectors for Liberian investment only. (See Chapter 6.). (Note: The draft revision to the Investment Code opens 15 of the 26 reserved sectors to foreign investment over a threshold of \$500,000.)
- Registration of a company is not, under current practice, interpreted as providing Liberian corporate nationality. (That is, only a company with majority Liberian ownership (51%) is permitted to own land.)
- Businesses in Liberia are required to register annually with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Tariffs and fees can be arbitrary. For example, GST may be charged on trans-shipped goods, and invoiced prices may be revised upward by the government for customs duty calculations.
- There is a 20% penalty for imports that do not undergo pre-shipment inspection.
- Firms report that negotiating major investment agreements is slower and more frustrating than in other regional markets.

Market Opportunities

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- Investment is increasing and the government has demonstrated commitment to reforming trade and investment policies to encourage private sector-led economic revitalization. The Ministry of Commerce is spearheading a commercial law reform program.
- There is tremendous demand for reconstruction of damaged infrastructure including roads, bridges, ports/airports and power generation.
- The Government of Liberia is completing the privatization of operations at the Freeport of Monrovia, which should create demand for port services equipment and rehabilitation engineering. Other promising sectors include mining, telecommunications, petroleum exploration, financial services and travel/tourism.

- In agriculture, principal growth sectors are expected to be in forestry, fisheries, rubber, oil palm, cocoa, coffee and food production and processing.
- The UN Security Council lifted sanctions on the export of diamonds and timber in 2007, and Liberia was admitted into the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme that same year. In October 2009, the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) International Board designated Liberia to be the first African EITI complaint country, and the first country to include the forestry sector in its reporting.
- American products are popular in Liberia, and the U.S. dollar is legal tender.
- The United Nations peacekeepers, plus the large number of civilian UN and NGO employees provide a short/medium-term market for many American products.
- Liberia has a solid legal framework to protect intellectual property rights, although enforcement is still weak.

Market Entry Strategy

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- Potential investors may contact the National Investment Commission (NIC) and the Ministry of Commerce for more information and guidance.
- U.S. companies interested in doing business in Liberia should consider hiring an agent, attorney or distributor to develop local partnerships.
- It would be imprudent to attempt to enter the market without doing thorough market research on Liberia to become familiar with the business environment.

Web Resources

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Ministry of Finance
 National Investment Commission
 Ministry of Commerce and Industry
 Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative:
http://www.leiti.org.lr/press.php?news_id=11
 Central Bank of Liberia

<http://www.mofliberia.org>
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

<http://www.cbl.org.lr/>

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Chapter 2: Political and Economic Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link below to the U.S. Department of State Background Notes.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

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Using an Agent or Distributor

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The Liberian government is revising laws and regulations pertaining to trade and investment so information may change quickly. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is updating the handbook of procedures and processes for businesses operating in Liberia and has established a web site: <http://www.moci.gov.lr/>. The government is also working towards harmonizing tariffs with ECOWAS neighbors. Some of the most detailed information on doing business in Liberia is found in the International Finance Corporation's "Doing Business" index and the National Investment Commission official site: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/> and <http://www.nic.gov.lr/>

The agent must be a registered business entity and may be used to bid on government tenders and assist in marketing. U.S. companies have encountered unscrupulous and unqualified individuals presenting themselves as agents. Offers to circumvent established business procedures or draw on political connections should be treated with extreme caution. U. S. companies are highly encouraged to exercise due diligence in hiring the service of an agent or a counsel, and to select one who demonstrates a strong familiarity with Liberia's regulatory and legal frameworks. Banks, lawyers, and business associations can assist with references or due diligence. (Contact information is on the Embassy Monrovia website <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>.)

Establishing an Office

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Only Liberian citizens may purchase land. Establishing definitive property ownership in order to rent can be complex, and the presence of the large UN and NGO expatriate community has put upward pressure on rents and other prices. Electric power is not

reliable and may have to be self-generated. Internet access is characterized by limited bandwidth and high cost. Skilled employees can be difficult to recruit. Many businesses decide to retain private security services.

Franchising

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There are a few foreign franchises in Liberia in areas such as remittances, petroleum marketing, automobiles and power generators. The lack of electricity and other infrastructure, poor intellectual property rights protection, scarcity of skilled labor and weak transportation links make establishing a franchise challenging.

Direct Marketing

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Most advertising is by radio or billboard. Low literacy, and/or lack of electricity limit the effectiveness of print, on-line or television advertisements. The domestic postal system is not yet fully functioning, so direct mail is ineffective. No trade shows are scheduled for 2010.

Joint Ventures/Licensing

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Most activity is in the service sector. Some legal and accounting firms have partnered with larger foreign firms to increase recognition or credibility with potential clients.

Selling to the Government

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The government is the largest purchaser of goods and services. Foreign suppliers may bid for goods and services that involve international competitive bidding. Government tenders are regulated by the Public Procurement and Concession Act, which established the Public Procurement and Concession Commission in 2005: <http://ppcc.gov.lr/>.

Distribution and Sales Channels

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A credible agent with extensive private and public contacts is crucial to effective representation. Most products enter Liberia through the Freeport of Monrovia and Roberts International Airport. Transportation outside Monrovia can be difficult and expensive.

Selling Factors/Techniques

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For many Liberians, disposable income is extremely limited and Diaspora remittances are an important source of income. There is a market for quality imported goods targeted towards businesses and government officials, as well as UN and international NGO employees.

Electronic Commerce

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Most Liberians do not have access to the Internet and e-commerce is in its early stages. Use of credit cards is extremely limited. There is no home mail delivery system, due to the lack of a standard address system. Some Liberians in the United States manage e-commerce ventures such as online shops and content publishing targeting Liberians.

Trade Promotion and Advertising

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There is little trade promotion. Radio remains the favored advertising medium and captures half of the market. Other media include television (only in the capital city), print, billboards and websites. Advertising is in English or one of the 16 indigenous languages.

Pricing

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The Price Analysis and Marketing Division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry monitors prices and sets price ceilings for rice, cement and gasoline. Efforts at price control can result in scarcity and black-market sale of those goods. Importers are required to submit cost information to the ministry for approval. Permitted mark-up varies according to product, and is based on FOB value. However, invoiced prices are subject to arbitrary revision.

A partial list of other sensitive items provided by the ministry in February 2008, included baby supplies, dairy products, canned fish and other basic foods such as wheat, sugar, frozen foods and livestock, drugs/pharmaceuticals, agricultural tools, building materials, toiletries, stationery/school supplies, petroleum products, auto parts, bathroom fixtures and appliances. The Ministry issued a regulation to all business entities in August 2009 to display price tags on their commodities in Liberian or United States Dollars, in line with the prevailing exchange rate. As a result of exchange rate fluctuations, prices for basic goods may fluctuate by up to 5% on a week-by-week basis.

The government is trying to respond to businesses' concerns about the opacity of pricing and access to import/export licenses. The Liberian Better Business Forum and other groups are working to increase the efficiency of business procedures and improve Liberia's rank on the IFC's "Doing Business" indicator. However, there remains a strong perception, among the public and many officials, that Liberia should be exempt from world prices and the laws of supply and demand.

Sales Service/Customer Support

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Sales service and customer support is variable. Most businesses find that new employees require extensive and ongoing training in how to provide adequate customer service.

Protecting Your Intellectual Property

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Introduction

It is vital that companies understand that intellectual property is primarily a private right and that the U.S. Government generally cannot enforce rights for private individuals in

Liberia. It is the responsibility of the rights holders to register, protect, and enforce their rights where relevant, retaining their own counsel and advisors. While the U.S. Government is willing to assist, there is little it can do if the rights holders have not taken these fundamental steps necessary to securing and enforcing their IPR in a timely fashion. Moreover, in many countries, rights holders who delay enforcing their rights on a mistaken belief that the USG can provide a political resolution to a legal problem may find that their rights have been eroded or abrogated due to doctrines such as statutes of limitations, laches, estoppel, or unreasonable delay in prosecuting a law suit. In no instance should USG advice be seen as a substitute for the obligation of a rights holder to promptly pursue its case.

It is always advisable to conduct due diligence on partners. Negotiate from the position of your partner and give your partner clear incentives to honor the contract. A good partner is an important ally in protecting IP rights. Keep an eye on your cost structure and reduce the margins (and the incentive) of would-be bad actors. Projects and sales in Liberia require constant attention. Work with legal counsel familiar with Liberian laws to create a solid contract that includes non-compete clauses, and confidentiality/non-disclosure provisions.

IPR Resources

A wealth of information on protecting IPR is freely available to U.S. rights holders. Some excellent resources for companies regarding intellectual property include the following:

- For information about patent, trademark, or copyright issues -- including enforcement issues in the United States and other countries -- call the STOP! Hotline: 1-866-999-HALT or register at www.stopfakes.gov.
- For more information about registering trademarks and patents (both in the United States as well as in foreign countries), contact the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) at: 1-800-786-9199.
- For more information about registering for copyright protection in the United States, contact the U.S. Copyright Office at: 1-202-707-5959.
- For information on obtaining and enforcing intellectual property rights and market-specific IP Toolkits visit: www.stopfakes.gov. This site is linked to the USPTO website for registering trademarks and patents (both in the United States as well as in foreign countries), the U.S. Customs & Border Protection website to record registered trademarks and copyrighted works (to assist customs in blocking imports of IPR-infringing products) and allows you to register for Webinars on protecting IPR.
- For assistance in developing a strategy for evaluation, protecting, and enforcing IPR, use the free Online IPR Training Module on: www.stopfakes.gov

IPR Climate in Liberia

Liberia has a solid legal framework for protecting intellectual property and has acceded to most international conventions on IPR. However, regulators and the judiciary lack the ability to enforce laws and regulations.

All imports of intellectual property must be so identified on the import permit (rather than being identified as "general merchandise"). All businesses dealing in intellectual

property must reflect that on their business registration form. The Ministry of Commerce has further information on IPR in Liberia. The Copyright Office is housed at the Ministry of Finance, while the Patent and Trademark office is at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For more information, see Chapter 6.

Due Diligence

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U.S. firms wishing to do business in Liberia are encouraged to conduct thorough due diligence on potential business partners. Hiring a local attorney or accounting firm is recommended and contact information for attorneys, accounting firms, banks, and business associations is available on the Embassy Monrovia web site <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>.

Local Professional Services

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There are several business associations. Lists of business associations, banks, accountants, and lawyers are available on the Embassy Monrovia web site: <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>.

Web Resources

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U.S. Embassy Monrovia Commercial Office:
<http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>

IFC "Doing Business" evaluation:

<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/StartingBusiness/Details.aspx?economyid=111> National Investment Commission <http://www.nic.gov.lr>

Ministry of Commerce and Industry

<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Ministry of Finance

<http://www.mofliberia.org>

Public Procurement and Concession Commission

<http://ppcc.gov.lr/>

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Commercial Sectors

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- [Fisheries \(CFE\)](#)

Mining (iron, diamonds, gold) (MIN)

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The mining sector is expanding rapidly. Liberia signed a \$2.6 billion Mineral Development Agreement for iron ore with China Union in January 2009. Until then, the largest investment in Liberia had been \$1.5 billion by ArcelorMittal, also for iron ore. Before the war, iron ore mining was Liberia's economic mainstay, contributing two-thirds of total exports, half of government revenues and a quarter of GDP. Gold exports are increasing, reaching \$3.6 million at end-June, 2009. There are also deposits of bauxite, manganese, columbite, uranium, tantalite, copper, tin, lead and zinc. Liberia's diamond deposits are primarily alluvial, and artisanal mining is widespread. Kimberlite pipes may also exist, although major pipes have not been located. Diamond exports continue under the Kimberley Process since lifting of UN sanctions in 2007, with partial exports of \$3.7 million during the second quarter of 2009.

Best Prospects/Services

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- Potential for support services for every aspect of iron ore mining;
- Key areas are supply chain support for operational needs, mine site personnel needs and employee support.

Opportunities

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Agreements signed with ArcelorMittal, China Union, Sime Darby and other large investors include commitments to rehabilitate railroads, port facilities, roads and to provide schools and clinics.

Resources

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Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy:
National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce
Liberia Chamber of Commerce:

<http://www.molme.gov.lr/>
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>
<http://www.chamberofcommerce.org.lr/>

Construction (CON)

Overview

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Liberia continues to rebuild after years of civil war. Most homes and businesses are being renovated. But the infrastructure remains deteriorated. According to the Central Bank, construction activity increased a cumulative 60% from 2006 through 2009 and continues to grow. International donors are funding rehabilitation of roads and bridges, the power sector, water and sanitation facilities, ports and airports. Several hotel projects are underway, and there is tremendous demand for housing both in Monrovia and in conjunction with mining investments or plantations around Liberia.

Best Prospects/Services

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- The construction boom has created a shortage of equipment, supplies and trained workers.

Opportunities

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A management contract for the Freeport of Monrovia will involve considerable construction, and Roberts International Airport continues to renovate to prepare for more international flights. Rehabilitation of the destroyed railways and port facilities is critical to the resuscitation of the iron ore mining sector. Donors are focusing on expanding and improving farm-to-market roads throughout the country. There are opportunities in low income housing and serviced office space.

Resources

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Ministry of Public Works:	http://www.mpw.gov.lr/
National Investment Commission	http://www.nic.gov.lr
Ministry of Commerce	http://www.moci.gov.lr/
National Port Authority	http://www.nationalportauthorityliberia.org/
Roberts International Airport	http://www.robertsinternationalairport.com/

Telecommunications (TES)

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Most of Liberia's communications infrastructure was destroyed during the 1990-2003 civil wars. Cell phones are common but only limited land-line phones services are offered by the state-owned Liberia Telecommunication Corporation (LIBTELCO). Internet access is expensive and bandwidth is limited. There are local TV stations and some satellite TV service, but the lack of electricity and low disposable income limits that market. Four mobile phone companies now provide service, and competition in the sector is high. The telecom sector has been characterized by arbitrary/heavy-handed regulation and by government support for reviving LIBTELCO that may compete with private sector investors. The sector is regulated by the Liberia Telecommunication Authority, which was established by the Telecommunications Act of 2007.

Best Prospects/Services

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- Opportunities in the cell phone market as the four existing private firms consolidate or expand;
- Liberian government and commercial offices require computer software, including virus protection programs;
- Many major towns remain without internet services.

Opportunities

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Opportunities exist in rural telephony and Internet communications as dozens of donors and international NGOs establish economic development programs. Government institutions covering areas such as petroleum, power generation, telecommunications, maritime, forestry, social security and finance will start investing heavily in ICT infrastructure and equipment as they gear up to monitor their various sectors.

Resources

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Liberia Telecommunications Authority
National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce

<http://www.lta.org.lr> (under construction).
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Power Generation (ELP)

Overview

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The Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC, the public utility) provides 10 MW of electricity in Monrovia with the assistance of international donors. All other electricity is privately generated. In January 2009, Liberia signed a \$150 million dollar agreement with the United States-based Buchanan Renewable Energy (BRE) to construct a 35MW power plant, fueled by rubber wood chips, near Monrovia. Longer term, Liberia plans to rehabilitate its hydro-electric facility at Mt. Coffee. USTDA has funded a feasibility study on rehabilitation of the Mt. Coffee plant. International donors are funding rehabilitation of the transmission and distribution system and undertaking management support at the LEC. In addition to rehabilitation of the Mt. Coffee hydro-electric plant, there is a demand for small renewable energy projects throughout the country. Donors have agreed to construct 66KV lines and four 10MVA substations and distribution lines for Monrovia and its environs.

Best Prospects/Services

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- Demand for electricity, especially from hydro or other renewable sources;
- Construction of transmission and distribution lines outside of greater Monrovia, where 98% of Liberians lack access to electricity.

Opportunities

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Buchanan Renewable Power plans to construct a 35MW power plant, and other investors are interested in 10MW heavy-fuel oil facilities for Monrovia. Rehabilitation of the Mt. Coffee hydroelectric plant would require approximately \$160 million of turbines, construction services and road renovation. The transmission and distribution grid needs to be repaired and expanded. Liberia aspires to participate in the regional West Africa Power Pool (WAPP).

Resources

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Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy
National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce

<http://www.molme.gov.lr/>
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Petroleum (OGS)

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Liberia is attracting companies interested in deep-water oil exploration. Responsibility for oil exploration lies with a state-owned enterprise, the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL). There are 18 offshore blocks for oil exploration, and among the companies that operate these blocks are: Texas-based Anadarko Liberia Company, Hong Kong TongTai Hong Kong/Chinese Petroleum International Corporation, Repsol (Spain), Oranto (Nigeria) and Woodside (Australia). Companies must drill at least one well within four years of initiating exploration. NOCAL launched the third round of bidding for the five remaining offshore exploration blocks in September, 2009. See NOCAL's website: <http://www.nocal-lr.com/>.

Best Prospects/Services

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- Exploration is not yet underway, but upstream and downstream products and services have potential;
- The need for storage tanks, additional tank farms and potential refinery capacity could provide build-operate-transfer opportunities.

Opportunities

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There is potential investment in several of the off-shore blocks. The state-owned Liberia Petroleum Refinery Corporation (the monopoly importer, which does not refine petroleum) is in need of major repairs and upgrading.

Resources

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Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy:
The National Oil Company of Liberia:

www.molme.gov.lr/
www.nocal-lr.com/

Financial Services (FNS)

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There are eight commercial banks with licenses or provisional licenses, but financial services remain limited and concentrated in Monrovia. As the Central Bank of Liberia increases capitalization requirements (from the current level of \$8 million to \$10 million in 2010) domestic banks may be open to partnering with foreign firms. As banks become stronger, they will compete on expanding services and locations, providing openings for financial service providers. The lack of electrical power or internet bandwidth is a constraint. **Note: Liberia is not subject to UN economic sanctions and there are no U.S. government restrictions on transactions with Liberian financial institutions.**

Best Products/Services

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- Financial management software and services;
- Banking technology; financial intermediation advisory services.

Opportunities

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Banks are expanding outside Monrovia, upgrading IT, and training new personnel. New entrants have put pressure on older banks to improve services. Banks are in need of the technology and services associated with a credit registration system in order to expand lending.

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Ministry of Finance
Central Bank of Liberia
LBDI
International Bank
Ecobank Liberia Ltd.
Global Bank
First International Bank
United Bank for Africa
Access Bank Liberia
Guaranty Trust Bank

<http://www.mofliberia.org>
<http://www.cbl.org.lr/>
<http://www.lbdi.net/>
www.ibliberia.com
www.ecobank.com
www.globalbankliberia.com
<http://www.fib-lib.com/>
www.ubagroup.com
www.accessbank.com.lr
www.gtbank.com

Travel/Tourism Overview (TRA)

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Liberia has beautiful beaches and the coastal waters provide good prospects for sport fishing and surfing. The Sapo National Park and the East Nimba Reserve provide opportunity for ecotourism and biodiversity. Other ecotourism sites such as the Kpatawee Falls and Lake Piso areas are being considered around the country. There is a shortage of hotel rooms, although several hotel projects are works in progress. Investment in this area continues to grow. As the economy rebounds and the number of business and other visitors increase, there are across-the-board opportunities in the tourism sector in both infrastructure and services.

Best Products/Services

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- Hospitality sector, supplies and services;
- Travel agencies, recreational equipment;
- Beach resorts and facilities;
- Water transportation services.

Opportunities

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There was a surge in hotel construction in 2008, including investment in eco-tourism outside Monrovia. Roberts International Airport continues to add additional carriers, increasing potential routes into Liberia and reducing costs of air travel. Liberia is becoming known for its premier surfing conditions, which may attract more budget travelers.

Resources

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Web Resources:

Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism: <http://www.micat.gov.lr/>.

(Note: Although the "Tourism" segment of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism website is as yet unpopulated, we include it for possible future reference.)

Four hotels are approved by the Embassy for occupancy by U.S. government employees because they meet Embassy requirements for comfort and security:

The Cape Hotel
The RLJ Kendeja Hotel & Resort
The Mamba Point Hotel
The Royal Hotel

www.thecapehotel.com
<http://www.rljkendejaresort.com/>
<http://www.mambapointhotel.biz/>
<http://royalhotelliberia.com/>

Food Processing Equipment (FPP)

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The government would like to encourage food processing to reduce food imports and to support potential agricultural exports. Possibilities include chili peppers and other spices, palm oil products and seafood.

Best Products/Services

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- Investment in training, equipment and supply chain management will be necessary to bring Liberian products to international standards.

Opportunities

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International donors are funding agricultural cooperatives and many retailers are interested in expanding their offerings. Growing U.S. demand for unique and rare spices and organic beauty products could ensure a market for Liberian spices and palm butter.

Resources

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National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce
Liberia Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>
<http://www.chamberofcommerce.org.lr/>

Forestry Sector (FOR)

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Of Liberia's 9.58 million hectares, 45% of the total (4.5 million hectares) is designated as multiple use forest land. At present, Liberia has ten national forests, excluding the Sapo National Park and the East Nimba Reserve. Commercial-use forest constitutes 2.3 million hectares, and 700,000 hectares is designated for community and other forest use. In 1997, timber production became an important source of revenue to finance conflict in the sub-region. Before sanctions were imposed in 2003 the industry provided up to 8,000 jobs, though many were informal and paid less than \$50 per month.

In February 2006, all timber concessions were voided as the government embarked on forestry sector reform. In September 2006, the UN Security Council lifted timber sanctions on round log exports. A Forest Law passed by the National Legislature in September 2006, along with associated regulations and a code of harvesting, meets international best practice and underscores transparency and accountability. In October 2009, the legislature passed the Community Rights Law, creating a legal framework for community rights in the management and use of forest resources. The Liberia Forest Initiative, (a consortium of the Liberian and U.S. governments, the World Bank, and international NGOs) is assisting Liberia's Forestry Development Agency with reform of its revenue collection and production monitoring procedures. Since 2008, Liberia has awarded seven forest management contracts (FMCs) and four timber sale contracts (TSCs), with a total projected value of \$12.5 million from land rentals.

Best Products/Services

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- There is demand for timber harvesting and wood processing equipment, including plywood and high-quality veneer processing centers, as well as portable mills.
- Liberia lacks kilns or other methods to treat wood products for export.
- Growing opportunities in non-timber forest products such as bamboo, rattan, natural oils, and medicinal herbs.

Opportunities

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Chain-of-custody procedures are being put in place, and timber exports should resume in 2010. Capital-strapped local companies will likely seek partners for concession management and equipment procurement.

Resources

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Forestry Development Authority (FDA)
Ministry of Agriculture

<http://www.fda.gov.lk/>
<http://www.moa.gov.lk/>

Agricultural Services (AGS)

Overview

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Agriculture is critical to economic revitalization and is the focus of the government's poverty reduction strategy. Agriculture and fisheries contributed 51.5% of Liberia's GDP in 2009. Total agricultural exports (including logs) for Liberia were \$98.7 million in 2009, accounting for 66% of the total exports. Output and yields are low, and there is no significant food processing or value-added. Most rice, the staple food, is imported but the government is committed to increasing domestic food production. A local NGO, foundation for African Development Aid (ADA) through a \$30 million loan from Libya, is involved in Liberia's first large-scale mechanized rice production project, and expects to supply the Liberian market in 2010.

There is increasing investment in plantation crops, such as rubber and oil palm, but issues of land tenure continue to delay resumption of many large-scale agricultural activities. In April 2009, a Malaysian company, Sime Darby, signed an \$800 million concession agreement with the government to cultivate oil palm and rubber on the former Guthrie plantation areas. Coffee and cocoa are traditional Liberian crops, and there is a strong focus on increasing yields. However, the poor quality of the current crops has precluded short-term export potential and consequently interest from foreign investors.

Rubber exports continue to dominate the export sector, accounting for 61% of total exports between January-September, 2009. However, Liberia's share of the world rubber market has dropped, as production increases in Asia and other African countries, and local rubber trees pass their productive lifespan. Liberian rubber producers export raw latex and block rubber, though the government is encouraging the development of more value-added processing and manufacturing. In November 2008, the government announced a temporary ban on the export of unprocessed rubber, as a means of protecting the local producers, but it eased the ban in March 2009.

The government is working to establish an SPS system for agricultural exports. Liberia has not yet exported any agricultural products to the U.S. under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). There is potential in agro-processing, horticulture, animal husbandry and plantation agriculture.

Best Products/Services

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- Wheat, consumer-ready food products, and poultry products;
- Agricultural equipment and machinery;
- storage facilities for agriculture products;
- Food processing equipment.

Opportunities

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There are opportunities in export crops such as rubber, oil palm, coffee and cocoa.

Resources

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Ministry of Agriculture:
Forestry Development Authority
Firestone Rubber Company

<http://www.moa.gov.lr/>
www.fda.gov.lr
<http://www.firestonenaturalrubber.com/>

Fisheries sector (CFE)

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Overview

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Although there are probably hundreds of thousands of part-time fishers, processors and mongers in Liberia, almost all fishing is artisanal. The government does not have the capability of controlling its coastal waters and illegal fishing by foreign trawlers is rampant. Domestic production in 2008 was reported as over 4000 metric tons for both industrial and artisanal sectors, while fish imports for the same period were double that figure.

Best Products/Services

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- Fishing vessels, equipment and inputs;
- Electronic navigation equipment;
- Fishing support services;
- Cold storage facilities.

Opportunities

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There are opportunities in cold storage facilities and cold chain equipment for export of seafood.

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Chapter 5: Trade Regulations and Standards

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- [Trade Barriers](#)
- [Import Requirements and Documentation](#)
- [U.S. Export Controls](#)
- [Temporary Entry](#)
- [Labeling and Marking Requirements](#)
- [Prohibited and Restricted Imports](#)
- [Customs Regulations and Contact Information](#)
- [Standards](#)
- [Trade Agreements](#)
- [Web Resources](#)

Import Tariffs

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The Customs Revenue Code and the Harmonized Description and Coding System of the Customs Tariff Schedules of the Liberia Act of 2000 still provide the regulatory basis for customs duties and standards. Duties on imported goods range from 2.5% to 25%. A penalty of 20% is charged on imports that do not obtain pre-shipment inspection certification. Presently, the government is working on tax reforms to harmonize Liberia's taxation and tariff regimes with its ECOWAS neighbors.

Trade Barriers

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Non-tariff barriers include the inefficient port, lack of roads and other transportation infrastructure (including electricity), and opaque administrative procedures that foster corruption. Import or export permits are required for all goods shipped to or from Liberia. The government has begun implementing plans to harmonize tariffs with ECOWAS countries. In February 2009, the Ministry of Finance established a one-stop-shop at the Freeport of Monrovia to streamline the customs processes, and in November 2009 it launched ASYCUDA (automated system of customs data) to fully automate processes and reduce customs clearance procedures.

Import Requirements and Documentation

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The importer must write a letter (requesting permission to import a specific quantity and quality of commodity from a particular country or trading zone) to the Minister of Commerce via the Division of Foreign Trade. The letter is accompanied by the invoice and bill of lading. Once authorization to import is received, the importer may purchase the Import Permit Declaration (IPD) form from the Ministry of Finance. The importer proceeds to the pre-shipment inspection company (currently BIVAC) to arrange pre-shipment or destination inspection, at a cost of 1.5% of the shipment's value. There is a

20% fee for goods that arrive without pre-shipment inspection. When those steps are completed, the IPD is issued and the import is approved. On arrival, after clearing customs, the importer presents costing information to the Minister of Commerce for price approval. There are separate procedures for rice imports.

U.S. Export Controls

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Liberia is not subjected to U.S. export controls. In December 2009, the UN Security Council lifted its arms embargo on the Government of Liberia for the period of one year. The Arms Embargo remains in effect for individuals and non-governmental entities.

Temporary Entry

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The Customs Revenue Code provides for temporary entry of personal effects and temporary importation of other goods. The government has reportedly been assessing GST of 7% on goods that are being trans-shipped through Liberia.

Labeling and Marking Requirements

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Product labels should show the net weight of the product, manufacture and expiration date, ingredients and origin. The labeling language should include English.

Prohibited and Restricted Imports

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Liberian law prohibits convict-made goods. Liberia recognizes international regulations on narcotics and other contraband.

Customs Regulations and Contact Information

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Customs regulations are administered by the Ministry of Finance, through the Bureau of Customs and Excise. <http://www.mof.gov.lr/>

Standards

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- [Publication of Technical Regulations](#)
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Standards Organizations

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The Ministry of Commerce, through its Bureau of Standards, is charged with assessing the quality of goods, but there is not currently a lab capable of quality testing. A number of ministries and agencies (including the Ministries of Agriculture; Health and Social Welfare; Public Works; Lands, Mines and Energy and Transport as well as the Liberia Telecommunications Authority, and the Forestry Development Authority) issue technical regulations on products within their jurisdiction. There are currently no standards organizations operating in Liberia. Liberia has adopted 220V, 50 cycles for electricity in order to harmonize with neighboring countries. In December 2009, the Ministry of Commerce set up a National Standard Board to curb the proliferation of substandard goods including food, cosmetics and insecticides.

NIST Notify U.S. Service

Member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries.

Notify U.S. is a free, web-based e-mail subscription service that offers an opportunity to review and comment on proposed foreign technical regulations that can affect your access to international markets. Register online at Internet URL:

<http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/>

Testing

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There are no known laboratories to test products. The Ministry of Commerce intends to establish a product testing laboratory for its Standards Bureau, with a focus on testing pharmaceuticals and food products.

Product Certification

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There are no mutual recognition agreements with U.S. organizations.

Contacts

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Ministry of Finance:

www.mof.gov.lr

Ministry of Commerce:

<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

National Investment Commission

<http://www.nic.gov.lr>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

www.mofa.gov.lr

Liberia Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.chamberofcommerce.org.lr/>

Trade Agreements

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Liberia is AGOA-eligible and has signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the United States. Liberia has also signed an Open Skies agreement. Liberia is not yet a member of the WTO but has observer status. Liberia has longstanding trade agreements with the European Economic Community (EC), the ECOWAS, and the

Mano River Union (MRU) countries. The lack of a definite trade policy has prevented Liberia from joining some regional and international trade organizations.

Web Resources

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Ministry of Finance:	www.mof.gov.lr
Ministry of Commerce:	http://www.moci.gov.lr/
National Investment Commission	http://www.nic.gov.lr
Central Bank of Liberia	http://www.cbl.org.lr/
Chamber of Commerce	http://www.chamberofcommerce.org.lr/

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Chapter 6: Investment Climate

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Openness to Foreign Investment

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There is growing investor interest in Liberia, particularly in agriculture, construction, the extractive industries and tourism. UN sanctions were lifted on timber exports in 2006 and on diamond exports in early 2007. Liberia is now Kimberley Process compliant. The removal of sanctions opened the door to investment activity in those sectors. Liberia has demonstrated consistent annual progress since its 2007 debut in both the International Finance Corporation (IFC) "Doing Business" ranking and the Transparency International corruption index. Liberia climbed 18 places in 2009 on the IFC's survey to 149, and jumped from 138 to 97 on TI's corruption meter. The National Investment Commission announced \$100 million in new investment during the first half of 2009. And the total number of businesses registered reached nearly 7,500 in 2009, an increase of 5.5% over the previous year. (Note: All currency amounts are in U.S. dollars. End note.)

Seven years of peace have helped Liberia recover from the ravages of civil war. Much of Liberia's infrastructure -- including roads, electrical grid, and communication systems - remains in ruins, but progress, supported by the substantial infusion of international development assistance, continues. Facilities for foreign visitors are adequate in the capital, Monrovia, but virtually non-existent in the rest of the country. There is a tremendous demand for jobs. Employment in the formal economy is estimated at only 16% of the available labor force, while most other Liberians are self-employed in the informal sector or contribute to a family business or farm. Most labor is unskilled, and the illiteracy rate is estimated to be 45%. While there are virtually no landline phones, cell phone service is widely available and coverage is being extended into rural areas.

Although satellite Internet access is available, it remains unreliable and relatively expensive, especially for high-speed connections. Major foreign investors typically are expected to include support for schools, clinics, and other social services as part of any concession agreement.

There are three serious challenges the Liberian government must address as it works to ensure equitable economic growth and reduce poverty: land tenure disputes, corruption, and the related factor of a dysfunctional judicial system. Expanded investment in promising sectors such as agriculture, forestry, mining, or tourism, and the ability to provide affordable housing for more Liberians, depends on rapid clarification of the tangled land tenure regimes and a significantly improved judicial system.

The impact of years of violence and bad governance undermined rule of law and created unchecked opportunities for corruption. The government benefited from the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), which sought to institute accountability, responsibility, and transparency in the fiscal management of the government in key state-owned enterprises. GEMAP, which is scheduled to end in 2010, has had a positive effect in many areas that influence foreign investment decisions, including mining and forestry policies, and transparency in the procurement process. However, lack of training, inadequate salaries and a culture of corruption have created a judicial system that actively hampers investment.

Liberia improved by 18 spots on the IFC's "Doing Business" ranking in 2009, reaching number 149 out of 183 countries. The Liberia Better Business Forum, a public-private initiative established in late 2007, is guiding proposals to further improve the business climate. However, the government continues to wrestle with finding the balance between an open, nationality-neutral investment climate that would encourage the energy, ideas, and capital that create jobs and provide lower prices and higher value for consumers, and "empowering" domestic businesses.

Seeking to empower Liberian businesses, the government in 1975 promulgated a "Liberianization Policy," an Act to amend the General Business Law. The Act set aside 12 business activities exclusively for Liberians. An amendment in 1998 increased the number of sectors reserved for Liberians to 26. These businesses include:

- Block making with cement, clay or like materials
- Supply of sand, stone and granite
- Operation of gas stations
- Peddling
- Ice cream manufacturing
- Commercial printing
- Travel agencies
- Advertising agencies
- Graphics and commercial arts
- Distribution in Liberia of locally manufactured products (this provision shall not prevent manufacturers or producers from transporting or otherwise distributing their products to Liberian citizens or qualified persons for resale)
- Cinemas
- Production of poultry products
- Importation or sale of second-hand or used clothing
- Retail sale of rice

- Ice making or sale of ice
- Operation of water purification or bottling plant valued at less than \$100,000 or the sale/distribution of water purified in Liberia
- Importation and sale of used cars
- Tire repair
- Auto repair shops with investments of less than \$50,000
- Entertainment centers not connected with established hotels
- Retail sale of animal and poultry food
- Taxi and trucking
- Shoe repair
- Retail sale of timber and planks
- Bakeries
- Retail sale of pharmaceuticals

The Act is still in force but has not been effective in increasing Liberian participation in commercial industries, nor has enforcement been consistent. (Note: The draft revision to the Investment Code opens 15 of the 26 reserved sectors to foreign investment over a threshold of \$500,000 and adds video clubs to the list of sectors reserved only for Liberians. The National Legislature is expected to pass this amended Investment Code when it resumes in mid-January 2010. End note.) The Liberianization Act mandates that qualified Liberians be employed at all levels, including upper management of foreign-owned companies. Some businesses owned by non-Liberians operate in contravention of the law. Using the Liberianization law, the Ministry of Labor has delayed work permits for expatriates and intervened in hiring decisions.

To obtain a concession for new investments requires a lengthy, multi-step process, but much progress has been made to ensure that procedures and requirements are transparent to potential investors. First, the concession entity prepares a request for Expression of Interest and an invitation to bid, based on the National Competitive Bidding regulations. The President appoints an Inter-ministerial Concession Committee (IMCC), including the Ministers of Justice and Finance and the Chairman of the National Investment Commission, to handle the bidding process and award the contract. The IMCC selects a technical team, including representatives of the contracting agency, to handle the technical aspects of the bid. A technical evaluation committee, also from within the IMCC, will evaluate the bidders and award the contract. The President sends the contract to the legislature to be ratified.

The following table indicates Liberia's ranking according to various metrics of transparency and good governance in 2009:

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Index/Ranking</u>
Transparency Int'l Corruption Index	97
Heritage Economic Freedom	48.1
World Bank Doing Business	149
MCC Government Effectiveness	26%
MCC Rule of Law	35%
MCC Control of Corruption	88%
MCC Fiscal Policy	74%
MCC Trade Policy	12%
MCC Regulatory Quality	18%

MCC Business Start Up	40%
MCC Land Rights Access	8%
MCC Natural Resource Management	37%

Conversion and Transfer Policies

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Both Liberian and U.S. dollars are legal tender. Most business and government transactions (such as taxes) are conducted in U.S. dollars; most street transactions are in Liberian dollars. The Investment Code allows the transfer of funds associated with investments, including profits. There are no restrictions on converting or transferring investment funds. However, the Central Bank of Liberia conducts a foreign exchange auction only once per week, and its U.S. dollar sales, which rarely exceed USD 1,000,000 are often oversubscribed, so large investors may find it takes more than one week to exchange large sums of money. ATMs are not connected to global electronic banking networks and traveler's checks and credit/debit cards are rarely accepted.

The Central Bank of Liberia regulates foreign exchange transfers. Transfer of sums in excess of \$10,000 must be reported to the Central Bank of Liberia, and no more than \$7,500 in foreign currency banknotes can be moved out of the country at one time. Larger sums must be transferred via bank draft or other financial instruments. Persons without a Liberian bank account are limited to two outgoing \$5,000 over-the-counter cash wire transfers per month.

Expropriation and Compensation

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The Embassy is aware of one claim by a U.S. firm of expropriation (looting) by LURD rebels who attacked Monrovia in 2003, before the current government was elected. The claimant has not been in touch with the Embassy since 2004. The Government of Liberia hopes to burnish its image as a destination for foreign investment, so appropriation of foreign assets by the current government remains highly unlikely.

Dispute Settlement

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Liberia's legal system is similar to the criminal and civil law in the United States, but laws are not implemented consistently or predictably. Investors cannot rely on the court system as a fair arbiter of disputes. Judges and other judicial officers are poorly paid, courthouses are in disrepair, and administrative support is weak. Judgments can be purchased, and foreign firms tend to be at a disadvantage. In 2008 an unreasonable court finding caused a major foreign rubber company to cease operations, and frivolous suits have been used to harass other investors. Due to the backlog of cases, it can be years before a hearing takes place. The Sirleaf administration is committed to judicial reform, and there are plans underway to expand Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, but reform will take time. The Ministry of Commerce, in collaboration with the IFC-sponsored Liberia Better Business Forum, has initiated programs aimed at commercial law reform. Liberia does not have general bankruptcy law to protect creditors' rights. There is a provision in the Central Bank's New Financial Institutions Act of 1999, which deals with voluntary and compulsory liquidation of financial institutions.

The Investment Incentive Code of the Republic of Liberia (the Code), adopted in 1966 and revised in 1973, prohibits nationalization of private enterprises and aims to attract foreign investment. The Government is revising the Code, but under the current Code, approved projects must ensure the employment of Liberians at all levels and expand employment and training activities as the enterprise grows. In addition, investors must permit Liberians to purchase shares or otherwise participate in the ownership of the enterprise, include a local value-added content of not less than 25% of the value of gross output, and utilize Liberian origin raw materials and other supplies. An approved investment should use imports only when local products are not available in sufficient quantity and/or its quality or price is not comparable to the intended import, as determined by the Government. However, given Liberia's limited productive capacity following years of civil conflict, requirements for Liberian employment and local raw materials are not strictly enforced.

Investment incentives may include exemption from customs duty and tax exemption on all profits re-invested in fixed assets and 50% of the remaining profits. There is also provision for loss carry-over and accelerated depreciation of fixed assets. Many large foreign investors negotiate further tax incentives on an ad hoc basis. The National Investment Commission of Liberia (NIC) implements the Code, and more details are available on the NIC website: <http://www.nic.gov.lr/>

Right to Private Ownership and Establishment[Return to top](#)

Land ownership is restricted to Liberian citizens. Chapter III, Article 22 of Liberia's Constitution states:

"Every person shall have the right to own property alone as well as in association with others, provided that only Liberian citizens shall have the right to own real property within the Republic. Private property rights, however, shall not extend to any mineral resources on or beneath any land or to any lands under the seas and waterways of the Republic. All mineral resources in and under the seas and other waterways shall belong to the Republic. Non-citizen missionary, educational and other benevolent institutions shall have the right to own property, as long as that property is used for the purposes for which acquired; property no longer so used shall escheat to the Republic."

The 2006 Forestry Reform Law states that natural forests are owned by the Republic, with two exceptions (Chapter II, Section 2.1). Rights to land ownership and to use of resources such as minerals and timber are likely to evolve in coming years, and the government has established a Land Commission to address questions of land tenure.

Many foreign businesses have entered into long-term leases, but disputes over land ownership and squatters' rights remain contentious, particularly for large concessions. Violence based on land disputes erupted in Nimba County in late 2008. In 2009, land disputes remained persistent, and were rarely adjudicated, but not resulted in violence. The government established the National Land Commission in August 2009.

Protection of Property Rights

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Conflicts between customary and statutory land tenure systems have not been reconciled. The official archives, including property deeds and secured property interests, were looted during the war and disputes over real estate ownership are difficult to adjudicate. The lack of adequate facilities and salaries for judicial officers also degrades enforcement of property rights as judges sometimes decide cases in favor of the highest bidders. The Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, which is in charge of survey and validation of land claims, has established an office for implementing a national mining cadastre that could eventually incorporate land title registrations. There have been cases of fraud by government-licensed land surveyors.

Liberia is a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and a contracting party to international conventions and treaties on the protection of intellectual and industrial property rights, including the Berne, Paris, Lisbon, Vienna and Washington conventions and the Madrid Agreement. The Act adopting the New Copyright Law of Liberia, approved in July 1997, provides the legal and administrative framework for protection of intellectual and industrial property rights. The Copyright Office (CRO) and the Industrial Property Office (IPO) manage these issues, but lack the capacity to function effectively.

All imports of intellectual property must be so identified on the import permit (rather than being identified as "general merchandise"). All businesses dealing in intellectual property must reflect that on their business registration form. Holders of intellectual property rights have access to judicial redress but enforcement is minimal. In 2009, the Liberia Copyright Office recorded 89 businesses, including songwriters, movie producers, and authors, holding intellectual property rights. Infringement of intellectual and industrial property rights is prevalent. Movies and music are duplicated. Counterfeit drugs, apparel, cosmetics, and computer software and hardware are sold openly. Broadcasters do not tend to pay royalties for use of protected material.

Transparency of Regulatory System

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The Liberian government continues to improve Liberia's ranking in the "Doing Business" index by making regulations more transparent, accountable, and effective. For example, in 2009, the government opened "one-stop shops" to streamline bureaucratic procedures such as those for licenses and permits, with an eye to facilitating imports and investment. The government's implementation of GEMAP and agreement with policy prescriptions advanced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are showing results. New regulations are improving the transparency of the government's Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC): <http://ppcc.gov.lr>. Harmonization of the regulatory environment across ministries and agencies with conflicting rules and regulations is ongoing. However, regulators can still be arbitrary or heavy-handed, and limited capacity means existing regulations are not always enforced.

Proposed legislation is not formally published for public comment, but the National Legislature has held some public hearings on issues of widespread interest, such as the Investment Code.

Efficient Capital Markets and Portfolio Investment

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The Liberian banking system provides basic banking services but there is no effective capital market or options for portfolio investment. Financial institutions are undercapitalized and unable to meet the credit demands of the business community. While credit is allocated on market terms to foreign and domestic investors alike, the historically high rates of non-performing loans mean banks grant only short-term (less than 18 months), high-interest loans that constrain capital investment and limit new business development. Total assets of the eight commercial banks were approximately \$279 million in 2009. Minimum capital requirements were raised to \$8 million in 2009, and will be further increased to \$10 million in 2010. The minimum capital adequacy ratio was increased from 8% to 10% in 2008. Banks have continued to reduce the proportion of non-performing loans since 2003 and loan quality is improving as banks expand their operations in the rural areas of Liberia.

The Liberian market offers the private sector few credit instruments. Liberia cannot issue debt instruments until it reaches Completion Point under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which is expected in 2010. Private companies also do not issue debt, in part because there is no government benchmark, and in part because there is a perceived lack of appetite for such investment instruments.

The weak judicial system means financial institutions find it difficult to recover bad loans through the courts. In addition, there is no effective credit rating system, and many firms lack the business records necessary for credit approval. The obstacles to domestic travel and communication increase the risk in accepting collateral outside Monrovia and the lack of secure land title hampers access to credit.

The United States has programs to support investment in small and medium Liberian companies, some of which provide services, such as lodging, communications, and construction, which improve the overall investment climate. In 2007, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation committed \$20 million to the Liberia Enterprise Development Finance Corporation (LEDFC) to support small and medium Liberian enterprises. LEDFC, which works closely with the commercial banks, is the first non-bank financial institution licensed by the Central Bank of Liberia to support small and medium enterprises. The USAID Development Credit Authority provides loan guarantees that help unleash private investment in key sectors such as agriculture and construction by sharing the risk with financial institutions. The United States African Development Foundation (USADF) has invested \$1.67 million in Liberia to stimulate job creation and improve income levels by supporting cooperatives and enterprises, including farmer cooperatives. USADF's portfolio in Liberia consisted of 10 investment projects in 2009. These projects provide sustainable jobs, technology transfer, financial and general management training.

Political Violence

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There has been no significant political violence since the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003 and the subsequent deployment of 15,000 UN peacekeepers throughout Liberia. The former Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was completely demobilized and with USG assistance a modern, professional force is being trained. By the end of 2010, the AFL will reach initial operational capability, but will still rely on international support. The Liberia National Police is also being restructured and includes an Emergency Response Unit (ERU), which has the ability to respond rapidly and to address sudden tactical police emergencies. UN peacekeepers, which now number 8,200 troops and 1,300 police, will gradually be withdrawn as Liberia's security forces gain in strength and experience. Increasing freedom and transparency for the Liberian people has led to vigorous pursuit of perceived rights, which results in active, often acrimonious, but non-violent political debate. Access to land remains a volatile issue that has led to violent disputes on the local level.

Corruption

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The Government of Liberia is tackling corruption, but it remains systemic. In 2009, Transparency International rated Liberia 97th of 180 countries on its corruption perception index, up from 138th place the previous year. This means, Liberia ranked 13th in 2009 out of 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 30th in 2008. The 2009 Mo Ibrahim African governance index showed Liberia as "most improved" in West Africa since 2005 and in the 2009 World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicator Liberia showed progress over the past two years in "control of corruption" and political stability and absence of violence. Although corruption is being addressed, travelers may encounter officials who solicit bribes (often euphemistically referred to as "cold water" or "my Christmas"). There have been improvements in the transparency of government procurement. The 34.5% increase in government revenues in FY2008-09, on top of the 47.7% increase in FY2007-08, reflects progress in stemming revenue leaks. Since taking office, the Sirleaf administration has boosted civil service salaries over 200% and continued payments of salary arrears incurred by past governments. However, the starting government salary is still only \$80 per month and despite efforts at reform there are still delays in paying government employees. The government is wrestling with how to maintain civil service parity while removing incentives to corruption in positions of traditionally high rent-seeking potential. Liberia is a signatory to two important international instruments: the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC). In 2006, the government along with Liberia's international partners designed the national anti-corruption strategy which paved the way for the establishment of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) in 2008.

Corruption, including bribery, raises the costs and risks of doing business. Corruption has a corrosive impact on both market opportunities overseas for U.S. companies and the broader business climate. It also deters international investment, stifles economic growth and development, distorts prices, and undermines the rule of law.

It is important for U.S. companies, irrespective of their size, to assess the business climate in the relevant market in which they will be operating or investing, and to have an effective compliance program or measures to prevent and detect corruption, including foreign bribery. U.S. individuals and firms operating or investing in foreign markets

should take the time to become familiar with the relevant anticorruption laws of both the foreign country and the United States in order to properly comply with them, and where appropriate, they should seek the advice of legal counsel.

The U.S. Government seeks to level the global playing field for U.S. businesses by encouraging other countries to take steps to criminalize their own companies' acts of corruption, including bribery of foreign public officials, by requiring them to uphold their obligations under relevant international conventions. A U. S. firm that believes a competitor is seeking to use bribery of a foreign public official to secure a contract should bring this to the attention of appropriate U.S. agencies, as noted below.

U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act: In 1977, the United States enacted the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), which makes it unlawful for a U.S. person, and certain foreign issuers of securities, to make a corrupt payment to foreign public officials for the purpose of obtaining or retaining business for or with, or directing business to, any person. The FCPA also applies to foreign firms and persons who take any act in furtherance of such a corrupt payment while in the United States. For more detailed information on the FCPA, see the FCPA Lay-Person's Guide at: <http://www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/docs/dojdocb.html>.

Other Instruments: It is U.S. Government policy to promote good governance, including host country implementation and enforcement of anti-corruption laws and policies pursuant to their obligations under international agreements. Since enactment of the FCPA, the United States has been instrumental to the expansion of the international framework to fight corruption. Several significant components of this framework are the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions (OECD Antibribery Convention), the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UN Convention), the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (OAS Convention), the Council of Europe Criminal and Civil Law Conventions, and a growing list of U.S. free trade agreements. This country is party to the UN Convention Against Corruption, but generally all countries prohibit the bribery and solicitation of their public officials.

OECD Antibribery Convention: The OECD Antibribery Convention entered into force in February 1999. As of December 2009, there are 38 parties to the Convention including the United States (see <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/13/40272933.pdf>). Major exporters China, India, and Russia are not parties, although the U.S. Government strongly endorses their eventual accession to the Convention. The Convention obligates the Parties to criminalize bribery of foreign public officials in the conduct of international business. The United States meets its international obligations under the OECD Antibribery Convention through the U.S. FCPA.

UN Convention: The UN Anticorruption Convention entered into force on December 14, 2005, and there are 143 parties to it as of December 2009 (see <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/signatories.html>). The UN Convention is the first global comprehensive international anticorruption agreement. The UN Convention requires countries to establish criminal and other offences to cover a wide range of acts of corruption. The UN Convention goes beyond previous anticorruption instruments, covering a broad range of issues ranging from basic forms of corruption such as bribery and solicitation, embezzlement, trading in influence to the concealment and laundering of the proceeds of corruption. The Convention contains transnational

business bribery provisions that are functionally similar to those in the OECD Antibribery Convention and contains provisions on private sector auditing and books and records requirements. Other provisions address matters such as prevention, international cooperation, and asset recovery.

OAS Convention: In 1996, the Member States of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the first international anticorruption legal instrument, the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (OAS Convention), which entered into force in March 1997. The OAS Convention, among other things, establishes a set of preventive measures against corruption provides for the criminalization of certain acts of corruption, including transnational bribery and illicit enrichment, and contains a series of provisions to strengthen the cooperation between its States Parties in areas such as mutual legal assistance and technical cooperation. As of December 2009, the OAS Convention has 33 parties (see <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/Sigs/b-58.html>)

Council of Europe Criminal Law and Civil Law Conventions: Many European countries are parties to either the Council of Europe (CoE) Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, the Civil Law Convention, or both. The Criminal Law Convention requires criminalization of a wide range of national and transnational conduct, including bribery, money-laundering, and account offenses. It also incorporates provisions on liability of legal persons and witness protection. The Civil Law Convention includes provisions on compensation for damage relating to corrupt acts, whistleblower protection, and validity of contracts, inter alia. The Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) was established in 1999 by the CoE to monitor compliance with these and related anti-corruption standards. Currently, GRECO comprises 46 member States (45 European countries and the United States). As of December 2009, the Criminal Law Convention has 42 parties and the Civil Law Convention has 34 (see www.coe.int/greco.)

Free Trade Agreements: While it is U.S. Government policy to include anticorruption provisions in free trade agreements (FTAs) that it negotiates with its trading partners, the anticorruption provisions have evolved over time. The most recent FTAs negotiated now require trading partners to criminalize “active bribery” of public officials (offering bribes to any public official must be made a criminal offense, both domestically and trans-nationally) as well as domestic “passive bribery” (solicitation of a bribe by a domestic official). All U.S. FTAs may be found at the U.S. Trade Representative Website: <http://www.ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements>
Consult USTR Website for date: <http://www.ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements>

Local Laws: U.S. firms should familiarize themselves with local anticorruption laws, and, where appropriate, seek legal counsel. While the U.S. Department of Commerce cannot provide legal advice on local laws, the Department’s U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service can provide assistance with navigating the host country’s legal system and obtaining a list of local legal counsel.

Assistance for U.S. Businesses: The U.S. Department of Commerce offers several services to aid U.S. businesses seeking to address business-related corruption issues. For example, the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service can provide services that may assist U.S. companies in conducting their due diligence as part of the company’s overarching compliance program when choosing business partners or agents overseas.

The U.S. Foreign and Commercial Service can be reached directly through its offices in every major U.S. and foreign city, or through its Website at www.trade.gov/cs.

The Departments of Commerce and State provide worldwide support for qualified U.S. companies bidding on foreign government contracts through the Commerce Department's Advocacy Center and State's Office of Commercial and Business Affairs. Problems, including alleged corruption by foreign governments or competitors, encountered by U.S. companies in seeking such foreign business opportunities can be brought to the attention of appropriate U.S. government officials, including local embassy personnel and through the Department of Commerce Trade Compliance Center "Report A Trade Barrier" Website at tcc.export.gov/Report_a_Barrier/index.asp.

Guidance on the U.S. FCPA: The Department of Justice's (DOJ) FCPA Opinion Procedure enables U.S. firms and individuals to request a statement of the Justice Department's present enforcement intentions under the antibribery provisions of the FCPA regarding any proposed business conduct. The details of the opinion procedure are available on DOJ's Fraud Section Website at www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/fcpa. Although the Department of Commerce has no enforcement role with respect to the FCPA, it supplies general guidance to U.S. exporters who have questions about the FCPA and about international developments concerning the FCPA. For further information, see the Office of the Chief Counsel for International Counsel, U.S. Department of Commerce, Website, at http://www.ogc.doc.gov/trans_anti_bribery.html. More general information on the FCPA is available at the Websites listed below. Exporters and investors should be aware that generally all countries prohibit the bribery of their public officials, and prohibit their officials from soliciting bribes under domestic laws. Most countries are required to criminalize such bribery and other acts of corruption by virtue of being parties to various international conventions discussed above.

Anti-Corruption Resources

Some useful resources for individuals and companies regarding combating corruption in global markets include the following:

- Information about the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), including a "Lay-Person's Guide to the FCPA" is available at the U.S. Department of Justice's Website at: <http://www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/fcpa>.
- Information about the OECD Antibribery Convention including links to national implementing legislation and country monitoring reports is available at: http://www.oecd.org/departement/0,3355,en_2649_34859_1_1_1_1_1,00.html. See also new Antibribery Recommendation and Good Practice Guidance Annex for companies: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/40/44176910.pdf>
- General information about anticorruption initiatives, such as the OECD Convention and the FCPA, including translations of the statute into several languages, is available at the Department of Commerce Office of the Chief Counsel for International Commerce Website: http://www.ogc.doc.gov/trans_anti_bribery.html.

- Transparency International (TI) publishes an annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The CPI measures the perceived level of public-sector corruption in 180 countries and territories around the world. The CPI is available at: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009. TI also publishes an annual *Global Corruption Report* which provides a systematic evaluation of the state of corruption around the world. It includes an in-depth analysis of a focal theme, a series of country reports that document major corruption related events and developments from all continents and an overview of the latest research findings on anti-corruption diagnostics and tools. See <http://www.transparency.org/publications/gcr>.
- The World Bank Institute publishes Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). These indicators assess six dimensions of governance in 212 countries, including Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption. See http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc_country.asp. The World Bank Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys may also be of interest and are available at: <http://go.worldbank.org/RQQXYJ6210>.
- The World Economic Forum publishes the *Global Enabling Trade Report*, which presents the rankings of the Enabling Trade Index, and includes an assessment of the transparency of border administration (focused on bribe payments and corruption) and a separate segment on corruption and the regulatory environment. <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/GlobalEnablingTradeReport/index.htm>.
- Additional country information related to corruption can be found in the U.S. State Department's annual *Human Rights Report* available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>.
- Global Integrity, a nonprofit organization, publishes its annual *Global Integrity Report*, which provides indicators for 92 countries with respect to governance and anti-corruption. The report highlights the strengths and weaknesses of national level anti-corruption systems. The report is available at: <http://report.globalintegrity.org/>.

Bilateral Investment Agreements

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Liberia has a few bilateral trade agreements, but some of the agreements have remained inactive for years. The country does not have a definite trade policy, which has prevented it from joining regional and international trade organizations. Liberia attained World Trade Organization observer status in 2007, but a transparent trade regime has become a pre-requisite for full WTO membership.

In October 2009, the government began a series of capacity-building programs, in collaboration with ECOWAS, to formulate a trade policy that would qualify Liberia for WTO membership. The draft Policy is currently being reviewed by a Technical Committee, headed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In February 2007, Liberia signed the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the United States to reduce trade and investment barriers between the two countries. Liberia is

eligible for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), though the country did not make use of AGOA trade preferences in 2009. Liberia has long-standing trade agreements with the European Economic Community (EC), ECOWAS, and neighboring Mano River Union (MRU) countries.

OPIC and Other Investment Insurance Programs

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OPIC provides coverage for investors in Liberia. The U.S. restored Liberia's eligibility for the Generalized Systems of Preferences in February 2006.

The Liberian dollar is a fully-convertible currency and operates on a free float with no predetermined path. It is therefore unlikely that OPIC would ever be required to pay an inconvertibility claim. However, there is some risk of currency depreciation in 2010, as Liberia lacks strong foreign exchange reserves and continues to run a large current account deficit.

Labor

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The Liberian labor force is predominantly illiterate and unskilled, and most Liberians lack basic computer skills. The literacy rate is believed to be about 15% for those below age thirty-five. Many skilled professionals have emigrated. The employment rate in the formal sector is approximately 16%.

Employees enjoy freedom of association, and they have the right to establish and become members of organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization or coercion. In this regard, no employer shall discriminate against an employee because of membership in a labor organization. The Ministry of Labor requires employers to demonstrate a goodwill effort to hire a qualified Liberian before it will grant work visas to foreigners, and some foreign investors find this process to be a lengthy one.

Labor legislation was revised in 2007, repealing a decree that prohibited workers from striking and repealing section 1508 (3), which permitted employees to be dismissed without cause. According to Liberian law, labor organizations and associations have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organize their administration and activities, and to formulate their programs. The labor law specifies that no industrial labor union or organization shall exercise any privilege or function for agricultural workers and no agricultural labor union or organization shall exercise any privilege or function for industrial workers.

Foreign-Trade Zones/Free Ports

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In 1976, the government of Liberia created the Liberia Industrial Free Zone Authority (LIFZA) to promote industrial and corporate growth, but no FTZs are active now. Almost no manufacturing is done in Liberia.

Foreign Direct Investment Statistics

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Investment and commercial activity continue to increase. The National Investment Commission reported \$100 million in new investment by July 2009, achieving its 2009 target of \$100 million during the first half of the year. Business registration data confirm

the sharp increase in investment activity. According to statistics from the Bureau of Domestic Trade at the Ministry of Commerce, partial year figures of total businesses registrations as of December 15, 2009 (foreign and domestic) increased 5.5% over the previous year, from 7,056 firms in 2008 to 7,445 firms. The Ministry registered 984 foreign owned businesses in 2009, about 15% increase over the 2008 figure. (Note: businesses must register annually. End note.)

Detailed investment statistics are not available. However, according to International Financial Statistics, the stock of foreign direct investment in Liberia from 2004 (when statistical estimates resumed after the civil conflict) through 2009 is \$641 million. According to an IMF estimate of \$880 million for 2009 GDP, FDI stock is 73% of GDP and 2009 FDI flows represent 11% of 2009 GDP. Liberia has limited, if any, foreign direct investment abroad.

Web Resources

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Government of Liberia

National Investment Commission

<http://www.nic.gov.lr>

Ministry of Commerce

<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Ministry of Finance

<http://www.mof.gov.lr/>

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<http://www.mofliberia.org/>

Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs

<http://www.mopea.gov.lr/>

Embassy of Liberia in Washington

<http://www.embassyofliberia.org/>

Consular (visa) information

<http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>

International Financial Institutions

IFC "Doing Business"

<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=111> or

U.S. Government

U.S. Embassy Monrovia Economic Section (includes list of lawyers, banks and business associations):

<http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>

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Chapter 7: Trade and Project Financing

- [How Do I Get Paid \(Methods of Payment\)](#)
- [How Does the Banking System Operate](#)
- [Foreign-Exchange Controls](#)
- [U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks](#)
- [Project Financing](#)
- [Web Resources](#)

How Do I Get Paid (Methods of Payment)

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Payment can be arranged through internationally accepted payment modes such as confirmed irrevocable letters of credit, bills for collection, and open accounts. Some basic financial services, such as credit cards, are not offered in Liberia.

How Does the Banking System Operate

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New banks are entering the market, and existing banks are expanding their services and branch networks. Banking regulations can be found on the Central Bank web site: <http://www.cbl.org.lr/>

There are eight commercial banks operating in Liberia: the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI); International Bank (IB); ECOBANK; Global Bank, First International Bank, United Bank for Africa, Access Bank Liberia Ltd and Guaranty Trust Bank (GT). The latest bank (GT) was established in March 2009. Access Bank is the only microfinance commercial bank in the country. Seven of the eight commercial banks are foreign owned. Banking institutions operate essentially as repositories for funds and provide short-term trade financing and operating capital. Banks have no domestic instruments into which to place liquidity and the Central Bank imposes a 22% reserve requirement. Banks rely on fee income from fund transfers and on cost of transaction charges such as deposit/withdrawal, or cashing checks. ATMs are not connected to global electronic banking networks and traveler's checks and credit/debit cards are rarely accepted.

Both Liberian and U.S. dollars are legal tender. Most business and official transactions (such as taxes) are conducted in U.S. dollars, while most street transactions are in Liberian dollars. The investment code allows the transfer of funds associated with investments, including profits. There are no restrictions on converting or transferring investment funds. However, the Central Bank of Liberia conducts a foreign exchange auction only once per week. Its U.S. dollar sales, which rarely exceed USD 1,000,000, are often oversubscribed; and large investors may find it takes more than one week to exchange large sums of money. Transfer of sums in excess of \$10,000 must be reported to the Central Bank, and no more \$7,500 in foreign currency banknotes can be moved out of the country at any one time. Larger sums must be transferred via bank draft or other financial instruments. Persons without a Liberian bank account are limited to two outgoing \$5,000 over-the-counter cash wire transfers per month.

Foreign-Exchange Controls

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Liberian and U.S. dollars are both legal tender, with a floating exchange rate. The Central Bank of Liberia conducts foreign exchange auctions that provide access to foreign currency. Daily exchange rates are available at the CBL website at:

<http://www.cbl.org.lr/>

U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks

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International Bank is partially U.S.-owned. The Nigerian-owned United Bank for Africa has a branch in New York.

Project Financing

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Financing for large projects is usually sourced from outside Liberia. Many reconstruction projects are funded by international donors, primarily the United States, the World Bank and the European Commission.

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United States

OPIC:

<http://www.opic.gov>

Trade and Development Agency:

<http://www.tda.gov/>

SBA's Office of International Trade:

<http://www.sba.gov/oit/>

USDA Commodity Credit Corporation:

www.fsa.usda.gov/cc/c/default.htm

U.S. Agency for International Development:

<http://www.usaid.gov>

Export-Import Bank of the United States:

<http://www.exim.gov>

Country Limitation Schedule: http://www.exim.gov/tools/country/country_limits.html

Note: EXIM Bank is open in the short-term only in Liberia (360 days max on capital goods) for the public and private sectors.

Liberia

Central Bank of Liberia

<http://www.cbl.org.lr/>

LBDI

<http://www.lbdi.net/>

International Bank

www.ibliberia.com

ECOBANK

www.ecobank.com

Global Bank

www.globalbankliberia.com

First International Bank

<http://www.fib-lib.com/>

United Bank for Africa

www.ubagroup.com

Access Bank

www.accessbank.com.lr

Guaranty Trust Bank

<http://www.gtbank.com/>

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Chapter 8: Business Travel

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Business Customs

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Business wear in Liberia tends to be formal (business suit and tie), although Liberians will wear a traditional cotton shirt on some occasions and more casual wear is appropriate for activities such as outdoor site visits. The usual greeting is a Liberian handshake (which ends with a snap), and it is polite to greet everyone individually when entering a room.

Visitors should arrive for appointments promptly, but it is not unusual for meetings to be delayed, or cancelled on very short notice. It is prudent to confirm appointments before setting out.

The postal system is rebuilding and, while effective for messages to major institutions within Monrovia, international couriers are advisable for important communications, especially from overseas. Include the recipient's telephone number on the envelope to facilitate delivery in the absence of standardized street addresses.

Liberia is a cash-based economy. Credit cards are rarely accepted, even by most major hotels, and travelers should exercise caution in using credit cards at those few establishments that do accept them. Traveler's checks can be cashed at an unfavorable rate at a few banks and hotels. U.S. and Liberian dollars are legal tender. Carry a supply of small-denomination U.S. currency for tips and incidental purchases.

Travel Advisory

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A visa and proof of vaccination against Yellow Fever are required for entry to Liberia. The Department of State advises American citizens to plan travel to Liberia carefully, given the shortage of hotels and transportation challenges. There are no reliable taxis available at the airport, so transport to Monrovia should be arranged in advance. (See following section on Transportation.) The most updated information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html. The list of major car rental

companies is available at: <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/pdfs2/list-of-car-rental-companies.pdf>

Visa Requirements

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All arriving travelers must present a valid Liberian visa and immunization certificate with proof of a Yellow Fever vaccination. Airport visas are only issued in emergency cases and require approval of the Immigration Commissioner in advance. An airport fee is assessed for each passenger upon departure. Information on Liberia's visa requirements is available from the Liberian Embassy in the United States at:

<http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>

Information on visas for Liberians traveling to the United States is available at:

<http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html> or <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security options are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Consular Section of the US Embassy in Liberia:

<http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/consular.html>

Telecommunications

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There is no functioning national land-line communications system, with only limited land-line phones services offered by the state-owned Liberia Telecommunication Corporation (LIBTELCO). Liberia operates on Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) technology, with four licensed providers. GSM phones and calling cards are readily available, including at the airport and hotels, and are activated upon purchase. The largest GSM service provider, owned by MTN Group SA, introduced limited GPRS access for "pull-email" in 2008 but there is only limited BlackBerry service (voice, but not data, with AT&T). LoneStar Communications (MTN) and Cellcom are the two leading mobile phone operators in the country.

Internet access is available at small "business centers" in Monrovia, and most of the major hotels provide wireless access, albeit slowly. Bandwidth is low and Internet subscription fees are high, due in part to high overhead costs such as the need to self-generate power.

Transportation

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The airport is about 40 miles from Monrovia and there are no car rental agencies or reliable bus or taxi services on-site. Visitors should avoid the yellow taxis and arrange transportation through a hotel or business contact. When traveling outside Monrovia, four-wheel drive vehicles are advised. Roads are in disrepair and during the rainy season many upcountry roads are impassable. Liberia has a tropical climate with the rainy season from May to October and the dry season from November to April.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

Language

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English is the official language and is almost universally spoken in Monrovia. There are 16 tribes, each with its own language.

Health

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There are few clinics and hospitals, and their quality is not up to U.S. standards. Travelers should purchase medical evacuation insurance:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

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Liberia is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Business hours are normally from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Liberian annual holidays are as follows:

New Year's Day	January 1
Armed Forces Day	February 11
Decoration Day	2nd Wednesday in March
J.J. Robert's Birthday	March 16
Fast and Prayer Day	April 10
Unification Day	May 14
Independence Day	July 26
Flag Day	August 24
Thanksgiving	November 5
William Tubman's Birthday	November 30
Christmas	December 25

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

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U.S. State Department travel information:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

U.S. visa information:

<http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html> or <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Liberian Embassy in the United States:

<http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>

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U.S. State Department travel information:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

U.S. visa information:

<http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html> or <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Liberian Embassy in the United States:

<http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>

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Chapter 9: Contacts, Market Research, and Trade Events

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- [Trade Events](#)

Contacts

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National Investment Commission:
Ministry of Commerce and Industry:
Liberia Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.nic.gov.lr/>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>
www.chamberofcommerce.org.lr

Market Research

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To view market research reports produced by the U.S. Commercial Service please go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov/marketresearch.html> and click on Country and Industry Market Reports.

Please note that these reports are only available to U.S. citizens and U.S. companies. Registration to the site is required, but free of charge.

Trade Events

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There was no trade event scheduled in Liberia for 2009. The Liberian Embassy in Washington has scheduled a Trade Mission to Liberia from January 30 to February 10, 2010, to enable American companies to explore business opportunities.

Please click on the link below for information on upcoming trade events in the US.
<http://www.export.gov/tradeevents.html>

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Chapter 10: Guide to Our Services

The U.S. Commercial Service offers customized solutions to help your business enter and succeed in markets worldwide. Our global network of trade specialists will work one-on-one with you through every step of the exporting process, helping you to:

- Target the best markets with our world-class research
- Promote your products and services to qualified buyers
- Meet the best distributors and agents for your products and services
- Overcome potential challenges or trade barriers

For more information on the services the U.S. Commercial Service offers U.S. businesses, please click on the link below:

<http://www.export.gov/buyingusproducts.html>

U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest Export Assistance Center or the U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center at (800) USA-TRADE, or go to the following website: <http://www.buyusa.gov/westafrica/en/> ; <http://www.export.gov/eac/> ; <http://www.trade.gov/cs/>

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report is accurate as of the date published. However, the Department of Commerce does not take responsibility for actions readers may take based on the information contained herein. Readers should always conduct their own due diligence before entering into business ventures or other commercial arrangements. The Department of Commerce can assist companies in these endeavors.

Web Resources

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Government of Liberia

Executive Mansion	http://www.emansion.gov.lr/
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	www.mofa.gov.lr
Ministry of Finance	http://www.mofliberia.org
Ministry of Commerce	http://www.moci.gov.lr/
Ministry of Agriculture	http://www.moa.gov.lr/
Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy	http://www.molme.gov.lr/
Ministry of Public Works	http://www.mpw.gov.lr/
Ministry of Planning & Economic Affairs	http://www.mopea.gov.lr/
Ministry of Information	http://www.micat.gov.lr/
National Investment Commission	http://www.nic.gov.lr/
Public Procurement & Concessions Commission	http://www.ppcc.gov.lr/index.php
Central Bank of Liberia	www.cbl.org.lr
Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative	http://www.leiti.org.lr/

General Audit Commission	http://www.gacliberia.com/
National Port Authority	www.nationalportauthorityliberia.org
Bureau of Maritime Affairs	http://bma-liberia.com/
Forestry Development Authority	http://www.fda.gov.lr/
Environmental Protection Agency	http://www.epa.gov.lr/
Embassy of Liberia	http://www.embassyofliberia.org/
Consular (visa) information	http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html
Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee	
http://www.emansion.gov.lr/content.php?sub=Background&related=LRDC	

Private sector/banks

Liberia Bank for Development & Investment	http://www.lbdi.net/
International Bank	www.ibliberia.com
Ecobank	www.ecobank.com
Global Bank	www.globalbankliberia.com
First International Bank	http://www.fib-lib.com/
United Bank for Africa	www.ubagroup.com
Access Bank Liberia	www.accessbank.com.lr
Guaranty Trust Bank	www.gtbank.com

International Financial Institutions

IFC "Doing Business"
<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=111> or
<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/StartingBusiness/Details.aspx?economyid=111>

U.S. Government

U.S. Embassy Monrovia	http://www.state.gov/p/af/ci/li/
Economic Section	http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html
Consular (visa) information	http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/consularoffice.html

Department of State Liberia Background Notes
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

OPIC	http://www.opic.gov
Trade and Development Agency	http://www.tda.gov/
SBA's Office of International Trade	http://www.sba.gov/oit/
US Commodity Credit Corporation	
http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=about&subject=landing&topic=sao-cc	
U.S. Agency for International Development	http://www.usaid.gov
EXIM	http://www.exim.gov
EXIM Country Limitation Schedule	
http://www.exim.gov/tools/country/country_limits.html	
EXIM Bank is open in the short-term only in Liberia (360 days max on capital goods) for the public and private sectors.	

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U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest **Export Assistance Center** or the **U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center** at **(800) USA-TRADE**, or go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov>

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report is accurate as of the date published. However, **The Department of Commerce** does not take responsibility for actions readers may take based on the information contained herein. Readers should always conduct their own due diligence before entering into business ventures or other commercial arrangements. **The Department of Commerce** can assist companies in these endeavors.